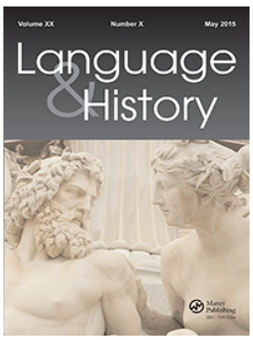

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Stanley Leathes and his influence on 'The Leathes Report'

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ABSTRACT

Described as the magna carta of language teaching, the 'Report of the Committee appointed by the Prime Minister to enquire into the Position of Modern Languages in the Educational System of Great Britain (28 August 1916)' is known as 'the Leathes Report' after the committee's chairman, Stanley Leathes, the First Commissioner of the British civil service. Leathes was not just a civil servant but also an author on education matters, including language education. His views had appeared in several publications over the previous decade, and many of those views are echoed in the report. This article analyses Leathes's texts and the parallels in the Leathes Report, especially his vision of 'Modern Studies', which linked the teaching of history and modern languages. In doing so, it reveals the origins and gives more detail of the meanings of some of the concepts in the Report. It has been argued that the Report is elitist. Leathes's own education took place in elite institutions as did that of many other civil servants of the time, but this article shows that it is a misinterpretation to say this led to elitism in the Report when it has in fact a meritocratic view of education, also present in Leathes's own writings.

KEYWORDS

Leathes Report; Stanley Leathes; Modern Studies; elitist education; meritocratic education

Introduction

In 1916, Stanley Leathes C.B. – he was knighted and became Sir Stanley in 1919 – was chairman of the 'Committee appointed by the Prime Minister to enquire into the Position of Modern Languages in the Educational System of Great Britain (28 August 1916)'. The report of the committee was referred to on publication in the *Contemporary Review*,[1] as 'the Magna Charta of Modern Studies', and this was echoed two years later in a professional journal where it was described as 'the "Magna Carta" of Modern Languages' with an interesting change from 'studies' to 'languages' (Waterhouse 1920, 1).

It is known as 'the Leathes Report' (LR), and the appellation is appropriate, given the substantial influence of Leathes's views on education. In this article, I will compare Leathes's writings with the text of the report, to

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[1]'Polites, 'The Magna Charta of modern studies', *Contemporary Review*, 113 (1918), p. 660, cited in Bayley (1991, 15).

analyse the many echoes of the former in the latter, and to examine the meaning of concepts in more detail than appears in the report.

There were 16, and sometimes 17, members of the committee,[2] and they had many discussions with people in the field, and not all of the ideas are echoes of Leathes's writings, but some important ones certainly are. It is not certain what Leathes's role in the writing of the report was,[3] but the work of the appointed civil servant in such committees often includes the drafting of text. Leathes probably had a major role in the writing and discussions, and the presence of some of his strongly held views is not surprising.

Leathes's writings on education

Leathes (1861–1938) was educated at Eton College and Trinity College, Cambridge, studying Classics. He taught history as a Fellow of Trinity from 1892 to 1903, and then took up the post of secretary of the civil service commission in 1903, and was from 1910 to 1927 First Commissioner (Dampier & Matthew 2004).

During and after teaching at Cambridge, Leathes was an editor and contributor to the Cambridge Modern History. He had a strong belief in the educational value of history teaching, and wrote between 1915 and 1923 *The People of England*. It was history written 'for boys and girls between the ages of twelve and sixteen' but was not a book 'to be committed to memory' nor for the preparation of examinations. Leathes hoped rather that it would 'stimulate the imagination of its readers, and put life onto the bones, blood into the veins, of ordinary history', after reading 'ordinary history' (1920, ix).

An important element of Leathes's belief in history had a strong, almost organic, national dimension, as he says in the preface, dated 1915:

> I hold the view - which some may consider fanciful - that there is a people of England with a national life of its own. It is at any time composed of all the men, women, and children of England, just as I am composed of the innumerable cells that make up my body. But it has a personal life, just as I have a personal life. And that personal life has been continuous at least since the time of Alfred.
>
> Part of that national life has been conscious. In war a nation acts consciously as a nation, and sometimes in politics and constitutional reform. But the greater part of national life resembles the unconscious life of an individual. Trade, industry,

[2]The members of the committee and the changes which took place in membership are listed on page 1. The most noteworthy change was when H.A.L. Fisher left the committee on being appointed as President of the Board of Education (equivalent to minister for education).

[3]The publicity for a seminar on the centenary of the report at the British Academy simply assumes that Leathes was the author (https://translating.hypotheses.org/820#:~:text=Known%20subsequently%20as%20the%20%E2%80%98Leathes%20Report%E2%80%99%20after%20its,to%20articulate%20a%20clear%20disciplinary%20identity%20that%20). The same view was taken in Byram (2018) and this article explicates that view in more detail.

> agriculture, sport, letters, architecture, are carried on consciously by individuals, but the nation is not conscious of them; with many other functions they go to make up the unconscious life of the nation. And in them the character, the instincts, and the impulses of the nation, are expressed. (1920a, ix)

This is from the first volume, written before the 1914–1918 war, but already with a noticeable reference to war. The second volume was written, to use his phrase, 'under the shadow of the First World War', and he emphasises the notion of a national spirit, a spirit which has revived as a consequence of war: 'The national spirit has revived, though while I write it is not yet fully awake – it is the business of history and historians and all teachers to keep it strong and steady.' (1920b, xi)[4]

It is clear from an article concerned with the recruitment of public servants, that Leathes has a self-conscious concern with promoting this specific view:

> Those who have done me the honour to read books that I have written know that I believe that our great people has in some sense a personal soul, a continuous identity, comprising, but distinct from, the individual souls and the ephemeral identities of the men and women who from time to time make up and have made up its human fabric. (1923: 345)

He refers to this in the Preface to the first volume as a 'philosophical theory', and in the second volume, he calls for the nation to will, to work, to suffer, to conquer ('if not to undergo, as a nation and as individuals, the uttermost penalty' [1920b, xi]). In all this he sees history as 'the great means of educating the nation as a nation to work together for national ends' since history is 'the proper school of civics and of citizenship' (ibid.).

Teaching history and modern languages

Besides being a historian, Leathes also had a strong interest in languages and language teaching. He mentions that he has examined in French although he does not say when or where (1913, p. 88), and in *Rhythms in English Poetry*, he says 'I know something of six languages' (1935, 1). He combines these two interests in much of his writing. In 1916, Leathes spoke to 'teachers of French' at Bedford College – a higher education institution for women – and again made the link between history and languages:

> As teachers of French, it is your function to open a door; the door which leads to the whole of French literature, to the whole of French civilization, to the whole of French history, to the mind of the French people. (1917, 4)

[4]It is noticeable that Leathes refers to England. He explains in the preface that he had to decide whether to write a history of the 'four peoples in these islands' but thought it was not his place to write for the other three. On the other hand he is writing for the young people of the whole of the United Kingdom because 'if it is desirable of us to understand the Irish, the Scotch (sic) and the Welsh, it is no less desirable for them to understand the English' (1920b, x).

Leathes then states explicitly his vision for the teaching of French:

> It is my ambition that education by means of the French language should be moulded into a coherent whole – a course of training in scholarship, language, expression, literature, and history. This end is still remote; it cannot be attained until the study of modern languages at the University is widened and humanized, but the ambition is not mine alone. (1917, 14)

The vision had already been formulated in his book *What is Education?* Where Leathes presents his proposals for 'A School of Modern Humanities' for universities. Universities should provide Schools in which teachers are 'thoroughly trained in English and the languages which they propose to teach (. . .) in the masterpieces of the literature and in the history which binds all together' (1913, 107). He criticises with some vehemence the Modern Languages Tripos[5] of the University of Cambridge, and stresses that students should read history and literature and see the relationship between them. Ultimately he recommends that the Historical Tripos and the Modern Languages Tripos should be combined (1913, 115). This never happened, although changes in the tripos were made.[6]

What is Education? Consists of nine independent chapters, some of which had already been published elsewhere, including in the *Times Educational Supplement*, suggesting that his views were known in the teaching profession. By the time of publication, 1913, Leathes had been First Civil Service Commissioner for three years. His motivation for writing is not explained in his preface; he simply says he has 'been impelled' to ask and answer the question which he takes as his title, and then 'to consider some of the ends which public, purposeful education should serve' (1913, vii). He refers however to a previous address by 'Principal Griffiths' to the British Association[7] in which the speaker had attributed defects in education to the system or the teachers, a conclusion Leathes disputes, saying the blame for the problems is more complex.

Of the nine chapters, four are focused on language education:

Chapter IV – Modern Languages in Secondary Schools

Chapter V – Compulsory Greek at the Universities

Chapter VI – A School of Modern Humanities

Chapter VII – The Teaching of English at the Universities.

Chapter V states from the start that Leathes looks to modern languages to offer benefits of education which 'correspond' to those of education in Greek and Latin, benefits he describes from recollections about his own

[5]Tripos is the term used to designate an examination and then the course of study at the University of Cambridge.

[6]Changes were made and it was decided that 'literature should be studied with close reference to the history and the social conditions under which it has grown up' (H. G. Atkins and H. L. Hutton, *The Teaching of Modern Foreign Languages in School and University*, (1920), pp. 202–4. – quoted in (Bayley 1991, 18).

[7]The full name was the British Association for the Advancement of Science, known since 2009 as the British Science Association.

education. He explains how Greek and Latin helped him and his generation to acquire 'a certainty, an accuracy, a confidence, a sense of what is possible and not possible in language' (1913, 80) through the study of grammar, doing translation, and composing prose and verse in Latin and Greek. This is echoed in the Leathes Report with the assertion that 'The "more or less," the "there or thereabouts," is not good enough in language, or in any instrument of culture or information' (p.16 para 56).

Recognising that not everyone of his generation profited from classical studies, he hopes that 'some' of these benefits will come through modern languages, even though these languages cannot replace the classical ones:

> But no wrestling with the awkward structure of a German sentence, no graceful manœuvring with the infinite resources of French, will ever give the easy mastery of language that comes from long practice in the artistic construction of Greek and Latin sentences. (1913, 81)

Another benefit is an understanding of another nation. It comes not from language studies but from the study of history:

> the living into the life of a people whose manners, customs, institutions, are different from our own and yet not so different that we cannot understand them. (1913, 82)

Ultimately however he concludes that French or German will not provide what the classics had given because there are no satisfactory texts:

> After much reflexion, I do not think that schoolboys[8] are ever likely, from the study of French or German texts, to obtain the kind of familiarity with the life of foreign nations that we used to get from reading Greek and Latin. There are no French books – at least, none of manageable dimensions – that throw such light on the life of France as Cæsar, Tacitus, Livy, Juvenal, and the speeches and letters of Cicero, threw upon Roman life. (1913, 92)

He also has doubts that the new methods of language teaching will provide the training that Greek and Latin had given:

> I believe that the domination of the direct method and the study of phonetics have tended to push this objective out of sight. (1913, 85)

And though he says he is not a schoolmaster and should not say anything against the direct method, he nonetheless suggests that the focus on spoken language should be replaced at a certain point, if there is to be a role for languages in liberal education:

[8]Although he refers to schoolboys, he is conscious of the limitations as he says in his Preface, revealing nonetheless a sexist view of education in his assertion that it should be different for men and boys and women and girls: 'For brevity, I have spoken as if there was only one sex – the male. Almost all my observations apply also to women and girls, to schoolmistresses as well as to schoolmasters. But I must not be taken as accepting the view that the education of girls and women should be identical with the education of boys and men' (p. xi). It can therefore be inferred that he has education for boys and men in mind most of the time.

> I think a point must be reached in the secondary school at which the literary study of the language becomes more important than the oral. From that point onwards more use might be made of French and German as instruments of liberal education than is now the case. (p. 86)

Leathes in the Leathes Report

Comparing Leathes's book and other writings with the LR reveals some interesting parallels and, it can be assumed, origins of concepts in the LR. Not the least of these is his assertion that languages and history should be combined. The LR has a section on the history of what it calls 'Modern Studies', the phrase introduced here to indicate that modern languages studies might be seen as similar to Classical Studies. It is argued that, to counter criticisms that modern languages were too easy – in comparison to classical languages – the defenders of new university courses have emphasised philological studies too much (pp 3–4 para 11). As an alternative, in the section dealing with the contemporary situation and reporting on the committee's consultations, the combination of history with languages is discussed at length. The Historical Association is cited as sharing:

> our belief that 'no Modern Languages should be taught in a University Honours Course without combining with it the history of the country whose language is studied.' (p 46 para 162)

This is followed by an explicit statement that 'The essence of our policy is the pursuit of Modern Studies in a historical spirit' (p.47 para 162).

The historical spirit is crucial to the attainment of a 'high ideal' in Modern Studies. The LR argues that there is in classical studies a high ideal which is more than the learning of classical languages and more than the study of 'what has come down to us the greatest minds of two great races'. Classical studies 'aims at an imaginative comprehension of the whole life of two historic peoples, in their art, their law, their politics, their institutions, and their larger economics, and also in their creative work of poetry, history and philosophy' (p. 16 para 55). Modern Studies should embrace a similar high ideal, and boys and girls should understand that learning languages is not an end in itself but the means to 'the comprehension of foreign peoples, whose history is full of fascinating adventure' but who are also alive today – the contrast with Ancient Greece and Rome remains implicit – and 'are engaged in like travail with ourselves, who see things differently from ourselves and therefore can the better help us to understand what is the whole truth' (p. 17 para 56). The historical is combined with the contemporary.

The benefits of language study in acquiring 'familiarity with the life of foreign nations', a phrase in *What is Education?* (1913, p. 92), are echoed in the importance given in the LR to overcoming 'ignorance of foreign

countries and their peoples' (p. 11). At the same time, the LR has a double focus with this kind of statement: on liberal education and on the instrumental or 'practical' value of languages. The liberal-influenced recommendations were about which languages should be taught, since this was a matter of which countries and peoples were important to 'civilisation'. There is an implicit contrast here between the practical and the notion of 'civilisation', but the LR emphasised the significance of the practical value by addressing this first and saying 'we owe no apology for putting practical ends first. Knowledge and training have a clear value in the struggle for existence; and in order to live well it is first of all necessary to live' (p. 15). Nonetheless the LR say quite categorically that the claims of Modern Studies cannot be based solely on practical needs and, when the choice of languages for schools is discussed, the potential practical need for 'non-European' languages gives way to 'The Chief European Languages', because here the notion of 'civilisation' comes into play.

'Civilisation' and the practical choice of languages

The brief given the committee made it clear that both a liberal education and the interests – perhaps today the term used would be 'needs' – of commerce and public service should be taken into consideration. The committee were charged to advise on measures to promote the study of languages:

> Regard being had to the requirements of a liberal education, including appreciation of the history, literature and civilisation of other countries, and to the interests of commerce and public service. (p. 1)

The concept of 'civilisation' is not defined explicitly in the LR but becomes evident in the argument proposed in the text. Even though the report claims that 'our literature is the richest in the world' (p. 7), its deference to French – and the need to prioritise teaching it – is unequivocal: 'French is by far the most important language in the history of modern civilisation'. The explanation of the criteria for the prioritisation of languages makes clear that 'civilisation' is as an improving and valorised concept:

> The importance of any language may be judged by the significance of its people in the development of modern civilisation, by the intrinsic value of its literature, by its contribution to the valid learning of our times, and by its practical use in commercial and other national intercourse. (p. 19)

Despite the nod to 'practical use', the description of the role of France in the Enlightenment, of European dominance by France for 300 years in the arts, sciences and fashions, reveals the values of the LR. Its description of England as a 'pupil' of France – her rival only in literature – may have been inspired by the analogy of Rome as the pupil of Greece in the minds of people who

wished to build Modern Studies on the model of Classical Studies. When the practical reasons are listed, it is the importance of French as the language of diplomacy and as a lingua franca, combined with 'physical propinquity'. Reference to the *entente cordiale* remains implicit but there is explicit reference to the 'special value' of French for Englishmen (sic: ignoring other Britons and women as was frequently the case). The final lines of the paragraph include implicit reference to the recent wartime alliance:

> Physical propinquity also gives French a special value for Englishmen; and recent calamities confronted and endured together should create an eternal bond of sympathy between the two nations. Fundamental diversity of character and temperament render mutual comprehension difficult, but once established it should serve to correct some of our national defects. (p. 19 para 65)

The reference to national character is a thread which runs throughout the report and strongly reminiscent of Leathes's writings on national character quoted earlier from his history books.

Other languages are also considered and the LR concludes that a range of languages should be studied in universities but, when it turn to schools, it reinforces the priority of French:

> We have decided that French should hold for Britons a unique position; among living languages French is for us beyond question the most important. (p. 28, para 9)

This does not however exclude the fact that in a minority of schools 'German or even Spanish or Italian' might be preferred.

The choice of French as the first modern foreign language is also present in Leathes's *What is Education?* Where he analyses in some detail the similarities and differences between modern and classical languages and among modern languages. French has the advantage of 'diction' which 'has been developed into a fine art' (p.86), whereas English is 'slurred and blurred'. Learning French would help to acquire 'the principles of elocution' which would be useful in certain professions such as barristers, actors, singers or politicians. German pronunciation is not comparable to French in elegance and accuracy. He argues that 'Our careless articulation may be corrected by the precise and studied utterance of the French' and that 'We know exactly how French ought to be pronounced (. . .) No consonant is slurred; every vowel is true and pure. English on the other hand is slurred and blurred; many of our vowels are commonly pronounced as irregular diphthongs or degraded to a nondescript' (1913, 86). He accepts that instruction in English diction would probably not be acceptable to parents who would feel offended that the language of the home was being 'condemned as vulgar or incorrect', but he does argue that learning French would lead to learning 'the principles of elocution' useful to those who become schoolmasters, professors, barristers, clergymen, actors, singers or

politicians (1913, p. 87). In the LR a very similar argument is made, but without the detail present in *What is Education?*:

> Our careless articulation may be corrected by the precise and studied utterance of the French: our modes of written expression might gain much from study of the perspicuous phrasing, logical construction, and harmonious proportions of their prose. (p. 19 para 65)

What is Education? Also says that French has the advantage with respect to grammar since, though not comparable in difficulty to Greek or Latin, it is 'a pretty study' and of interest in relation to logic and thought (1913, 88). French should be the first language in secondary education, whether liberal or commercial. German should follow for those with commercial aspirations and Latin for those desiring a liberal education, but only after boys (sic) had proved themselves capable of studying French successfully.

The LR comes to the same conclusion:

> From every point of view French is, for us above all, the most important of living tongues; it has, and it should retain, the first place in our schools and Universities. (p. 19 para 65)

The foundation for modern languages in schools and universities and the dominance of French in schools is thus laid both in the LR and in Leathes's own writing, and the view of language learning as a means to an end – both practical and liberal educational – is constantly reinforced.

It is then noteworthy that four members of the committee expressed their reservations about aspects of the report, including the emphasis on French, in an appendix, pages 67–73. They refer to a substantial part of the report, pages 24–41, dealing with the treatment of languages in schools, and begin with their reservations about 'the educational value of French and Latin'. Presenting their views on whether French is 'easy' or not, and can 'by itself provide all that is necessary for language training', they conclude that 'we do not hold that French is the language best suited to discipline and train the youthful mind to an appreciation of language and its use' (p. 67). Leathes's view seems to have prevailed but against the views of this minority.

Modern Studies, liberal education and business

The reasons given in the LR for Modern Studies are fivefold: the business value; the increase of knowledge in general; the need for knowledge concerning foreign countries and peoples; knowledge important for the public service; and Modern Studies as part of general education and culture. These reasons are put forward after an initial analysis of why Modern Studies has been neglected, and the need to strengthen the first four is attributed to the complacency of the British: 'Our necessity (for

Modern Studies) was not apparent; our profit was sufficient; the most part of us found in other ways such modest intellectual satisfaction as we craved' (LR p.7 para 24). The values identified are expected to overcome the complacency in different spheres: trade has been satisfactory but in fact hampered by lack of language study and the modern studies which language study facilitates; the whole world is a 'manufactory of knowledge' and much of this is only available in other languages; lack of knowledge of other countries and peoples among the general public has been particularly evident during the war years and created problems of various kinds; this knowledge is all the more important in public service, in diplomacy and consular work, but also in ministries such as education, trade and agriculture where knowledge of what happens elsewhere is relevant to further development, and also in the armed services. These are the first four reasons for valuing Modern Studies, and Leathes also expresses his acute awareness of the importance of business in Chapter II of *What is Education?*: 'If education is a preparation for life, it must be a preparation for business. For business is the larger part of life, though not perhaps the more important part of life, and certainly not the whole' (1913, p. 34). His qualifying 'though not perhaps the more important' anticipates his argument that education currently fails because it is too close to the level of business: 'Business creeps near the ground; education often fails to rise above it' (1913, 35), although he does not argue for disregarding the usefulness of languages.

There are echoes of Leathes's contrast of business and education in the fifth reason for Modern Studies in the LR and the contrast with the first four. It adds a value to the practical demands of life which, in a striking assertion, may be more valuable than life itself:

> Culture and civilisation are by-products of life; but like some other by-products they may yield a greater return than the parent industry. What gives dignity and splendour to life may be more precious than the life itself. (p. 15 para 53)

Behind this are two key ideas: first, the notion of culture which develops 'the higher faculties, the imagination, the sense of beauty, and the intellectual comprehension' and, second, the comparison with Classical Studies as a proven source of cultural development. The comparison deliberately demonstrates that Modern Studies can have the same function as Classical Studies. The insistence that language is only a means to an end is made clear, with the statement that Classical Studies 'does not mean Latin and Greek' but the scholarship on which is based 'an imaginative comprehension of two historic peoples' from whom we can learn a better way of life. Modern Studies must aspire to this, for it is not sufficient to base Modern Studies on the practical reasons, important as these are.

As quoted earlier, in *What is Education?*, Leathes had said that the study of French and German could be 'instruments of liberal education' (p. 86), and before his analysis of modem languages he had given a detailed account of his own, classical, language education, including some of its weaknesses. Classical languages meant acquiring 'a sense of what is possible and not possible in language' (p.80), 'useful mental gymnastics'[9] from translation, 'the easy mastery of language' from composition in prose and poetry, and 'living into the life of a people' from history, which came 'not by lectures or systematic instruction, but in the effort to master and understand the books we were set to read' (p. 82). This is reflected in the discourse of the LR which argues that Modern Studies can achieve what Classics has done, albeit without the detailed analysis of the contribution of each aspect of language study which Leathes had included in *What is Education?*.

Elitist or meritocratic?

Bayley (1991, 20) considers the LR to be 'elitist',[10] it 'presented an ideal, elitist in concept and liberal in approach, espoused by the majority in the teaching profession and Board of Education.' She appears to be using the term in a depreciative way. Her argument turns on an article by Savage (1983) which, according to Bayley, has a 'cogent argument' that the officials of the Board of Education wielded strong influence and that, being mainly from elite schools and universities, it is not surprising that they pursued policies of an elitist nature. Savage writes about the period 1919 to 1939 but Bayley says there is no reason not to extend Savage's argument to the period before 1919, although she does not say why.

In fact Savage says that the influence was stronger in the later part of her period and that civil servants 'only occasionally attempted to initiate policy changes', and give examples from the late 1920s and early 1930s. Writing about the earlier years, she describes a particular case:

> Although the support of the civil servants was not crucial to the original passage of the act - Fisher's position in the Cabinet was the vital factor in that accomplishment - their loyalty to Fisher and their support of his policy came into play when the government began to back away from implementing Fisher's programmes because of their cost. (1983, 267)

[9]He makes a brief comparison with bilinguals such as the Welsh 'who get more from their elementary schools than the scholars of a country like England, where only one language is used in school', an insight which has been confirmed by empirical research which began only half a century later.

[10]The terms 'elitist' and 'meritocratic' were not used by Leathes. They came into usage, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, in the 1940s and 1950s respectively. The OED defines 'elitism' as: 'Advocacy of or reliance on the leadership and dominance of an elite (in a society, group of people, etc.). Hence also: the perceived dominance of a society or system by an elite. Now chiefly depreciative'. Meritocracy is defined as: Government or the holding of power by people chosen on the basis of merit (as opposed to wealth, social class, etc.); a society governed by such people or in which such people hold power; a ruling, powerful, or influential class of educated or able people. Also in extended use'.

Savage refers here to the educational reform in the final years of the war. In 1918, Fisher introduced a new Education Act and in so doing focused on the importance of widening access to education. He compared it to the growing recognition of the need to extend the elective franchise to women, 'widening access' in today's phrase:

> [T]hat same logic which leads us to desire an extension of the franchise wants also an extension of education. There is a growing sense, not only in England but through Europe, and I must say especially in France, that the industrial workers of the country are entitled to be considered primarily as citizens and as fit subjects for any form of education from which they are capable of profiting. (*Hansard*, 10 August 1917, cited in Maclure 1965, 173)

Fisher admires workers who want education to be 'a source of pure enjoyment and refuge from the necessary hardships of a life spent in the midst of clanging machinery in our hideous cities of toil' (cited in Maclure 1965, 173), and is meritocratic in his view that workers want education to earn higher wages or to rise out of their own class.

The LR itself has nothing which could be construed as elitist in a depreciative sense. There are however passages which can be construed as meritocratic. For example, there is reference to 'better boys' being able to make substantial progress in the teaching of classical language (p 29 para 95), secondly an assertion that a second foreign language should not be compulsory but might be 'more congenial to certain pupils' (p 31 para 103), and that there may be an 'exceptional few who can with profit study more than two languages at school' (p 31 para 106).

At first sight Leathes seems to embody Bayley's view of officials. He went to Eton College which is as elitist now as then, being a prime example of Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) demonstration of how a wealthy social class ensures the passing of cultural, social and economic capital from generation to generation. However, in *What is Education?*, Leathes criticises the education he received, saying the course of study was 'defective' because it comprised almost exclusively Latin and Greek, with little or no study of history or the natural sciences, and because only a minority could profit from it. He suggests that the many who did not were stupid, dull or idle, but he also says that he is 'willing to admit that many of them might have learnt more if the course of study had been better suited to their faculties' (1913 p. 83). He goes on to argue that, because the classical languages are difficult but important, he would make them 'a prize for those boys who proved themselves capable of learning other and easier languages' (1913, 84) since '[s]uch boys under such circumstances would learn more Latin and Greek in four years than most of us did in ten', and their other studies would not suffer (1913, 85). Leathes believed that some people – 'boys' – were more able and assiduous than others and that they should be 'rewarded' with

a different curriculum. We may or may not agree with his notion of what a better curriculum would be, but there is no evidence that he thought that a better curriculum should be reserved for students from a specific social group.

A more precise understanding of his thinking can be found in his anonymously written *Vox Clamantis* (1911), a publication of almost 200 pages which develops 'the thesis that the well-being of the State depends upon the harmonious balance of the opposing forces of liberty and order' (p. 3). Its main argument is against political 'collectivism', engaging with 'the extreme school of "socialists", who put forward collective ownership as their ultimate goal and some of whom do not fear to indicate a bloody revolution as the necessary means to this end' (1911, 117). His argument is built upon economic analysis of collectivism but he explains in his preface that one of his objects is to establish 'correct and consistent use of such current terms as liberty, democracy, aristocracy, socialism' (1911, viii). It is in his analysis of the meaning of 'aristocracy' that his understanding of elitism and meritocracy – words he does not use – is to be found.

Concerned about good governance, he says that every state must seek as its leaders or governors 'the best who can be found' and this is 'the aristocratic principle'. The meaning of this phrase becomes clear when he says that 'In the permanent services of the State, promotion strictly according to merit is an ideal'. It is however an ideal difficult to attain, and he therefore considers different ways in which an aristocracy can be identified. This includes competitive examinations or selection committees. It also includes 'hereditary aristocracy' which he admits is 'at a discount among political theorists', but he argues that 'hereditary aristocrats' have the qualities of good governors. Those who govern in the House of Commons, – he explicitly puts aside the question of the House of Lords – should be people of all kinds: hereditary aristocrats and other kinds of aristocrat, including 'the self-made man' and 'captains of industry and commerce'.

It is in the implicit comparison of hereditary and other aristocrats that Leathes reveals a tendency to elitism. On the one hand he says that self-made men and captains of industry may not all be appropriate. They face temptations in their rise, including fraud, and some succumb. On the other hand he assumes that all hereditary aristocrats have the characteristics he expects the best governors to have. This assumption is certainly elitist and is in tension with his emphasis on merit. However, he concludes the chapter with an emphasis on merit:

> In order that a great democracy should rise to the measure of its full stature, it must first be the rule of the whole people in the interests of the whole; and secondly the instruments of the people's choice must be the best available, selected by merit without prejudice wherever they may be found, whether in classes that are commonly considered high, or classes that are often called low. (1911, 80-81)

The careful use of 'commonly considered' and 'often called' is an indication of his dissociation from the class elitism to which Bayley alludes.

Conclusion

Seen as the Magna Carta of language teaching in its time, a century later the Leathes Report was called Britain's 'most comprehensive review of languages provision' (McLelland 2019). Reports have authors, and in this article I have traced the thinking of the man who was probably the main author of the LR. My purpose has been to identify the parallels and to infer and analyse the influential relationship between Leathes the lecturer and author and the Leathes present in the LR. This is not to say that the 16 members of the committee are not present too and perhaps as authors.

I have also attempted to reveal in more depth the meanings of concepts and proposals put forward in the LR. The most striking element of the report which had been so clearly presaged in Leathes's writings is the introduction of the notion of Modern Studies. It is, too, the element which has been the basis for arguing that the LR is elitist, a claim which I have shown is not justified. It is also the element which was not taken up in its full potential. The emphasis on 'the interests of commerce and public service' has in the meantime become ever stronger whilst the liberal purposes have become ever weaker. McLelland summarises this well in her contrast of the Leathes Report with two reports of the Committee on Research and Development in Modern Languages 50 years later (1968, 1971) which:

> dissolved the hard-won link between language learning and intellectual or aesthetic education of young minds - a link which had first given Modern Languages their disciplinary status alongside such subjects as the classics and English - and so relegated language learning with one fell swoop to the status that it had had until at least the sixteenth century: a practical necessity for some. (2017, 197)

In a later text, McLelland (2019) draws on the same contrast in her plea for more governmental support for languages after Brexit. Although she begins with the post-Brexit interests of commerce and public service, 'trade, international relations and soft power', she also presents an argument – albeit limited to advanced levels which I think is unnecessary – for a liberal education perspective, as Leathes did a century before:

> The government should change its tune to school leaders, careers advisors, parents and learners, and explain that languages subjects at A-level and beyond are not just about communication skills. They are part of the liberal arts menu of subjects that stimulate the deeper analytical, critical and creative thinking that enriches individuals and enhances innovation and enterprise in any endeavour.

As we have seen both Leathes and the LR are very emphatic about the importance of languages and Modern Studies in business and public life – not only at advanced levels – but neither make the connection, hinted at by McLelland, that analytical, critical and creative thinking as educational aims are just as useful in business and public life as in the private life of the individual. The connection is now widely recognised as important in the business world, as any internet search will show; there are guides to such thinking and there are numerous academic articles on the need to ensure the connections to critical thinking are made in business education (e.g. Braun 2004; Bandyopadhyay & Szostek 2019). Yet language teaching has failed to make this connection strongly enough, opting largely for an instrumental justification when a richer vision would merge the instrumental and the educational. Leathes and the LR still provide a most articulate argument for both, and it can be used today just as it was in 1918.

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[In addition, there is a substantial work on history including his editorship of, and contributions to, the *Cambridge Modern History*]

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